

Conceptual Greenbelt Strategy

Coyote Valley Specific Plan (CVSP)

Vision

South Coyote Valley should be a special place, maintaining a permanent non-urban buffer between the Cities of San Jose and Morgan Hill. The goal is to create a high quality environment that includes riparian amenities, trails, natural habitats, beautiful open space surroundings and vistas, connections to the hillsides, and high quality home sites in a rural setting. South Coyote Valley should support and continue Santa Clara County's agricultural heritage by providing opportunities for all forms of agriculture, particularly small-scale agriculture, including agro-based industries and related activities.

Key City Council's Vision and Expected Outcomes for the CVSP

- Outcome #1: The plan will include Central and North Coyote for land planning and will include South Coyote in the infrastructure financing mechanism only. South Coyote (Greenbelt) is included only to determine financing and other mechanisms to secure this as a permanent Greenbelt.
- Outcome #2: The line (Greenline) between Central and South shall not be moved.
- Outcome #11: The plan must be financially feasible for private development.
- Outcome #14: The plan should seek mechanisms to facilitate the permanent acquisition of fee title or conservation easements in South Coyote.

Existing Regulatory Framework

Existing County and City land use regulations generally require a minimum area of 20 acres per parcel. Properties located in the County, on the east side of Monterey Road, are designated for large-scale agriculture with a 40-acre minimum lot size requirement. In addition, a couple of properties on the western hillsides are subject to 20 to 160 acre minimum parcel sizes depending on the County's variable slope-density formula¹. Excerpts from County and City regulations are attached.

Findings from Greenbelt Research²

Economic Challenges

1. Conventional agriculture is less viable due to:
 - a. Depressed markets for conventional farm products, mainly due to imports

¹ Excerpts from County and City regulations are available at the following link:
http://www.sanjoseca.gov/coyotevalley/info_Greenbelt.htm

² The Greenbelt Research conducted by CVSP consultant, SAGE, is available at the following link:
http://www.sanjoseca.gov/coyotevalley/info_Greenbelt.htm

- b. Rising costs of inputs: fuel, fertilizer, pesticides
 - c. Labor: unavailable, too expensive, hard to attract and retain in high-priced area
 - d. Regulatory barriers: many, too expensive, too time-consuming
 - e. Loss of processing facilities, mainly for prunes, a mainstay crop for decades
 - f. Small parcels are inefficient
 - g. Traffic impedes movement of farm machinery
2. Uncertainty is not conducive to expansion of and investment in agricultural businesses
 3. High land prices prevent “new” farmers from buying lands within the Greenbelt
 4. Funding for the purchase of open space and agricultural easements is limited
 - a. Trusts and similar funders may achieve their objectives more efficiently on less expensive land

Environmental Challenges

1. Farmers report the presence of poor or problematic soils that result in poor crop production.
2. Many wells are low or non-producing and may require expensive retrofitting
3. High nitrate levels in some wells makes them unsuitable for irrigation
4. High ground water levels in the rainy season make areas round Fisher Creek prone to flooding, and thus inappropriate for agriculture
5. There are 19 hazardous materials users and/or spill incidents documented in Greenbelt. Most of these are dangerous on account of Above-Ground Storage Tanks (ASTs) or Underground Storage Tanks (USTs), which may contain pesticides and herbicides that may impede the establishment of organic agriculture.
6. Pressure from wildlife “pests” (e.g. ground squirrels, wild turkeys, feral pigs) towards the western hills.
7. Potential buffer and liability issues between housing, agriculture, and wildlife uses.

Economic Opportunities and Potential

1. An aesthetic agricultural and natural landscape, intermixed with recreational opportunities could raise home site values and add value to surrounding urban areas.

2. Economic and environmental sustainability, multi-functional land use, and community health, are beneficial for the new development in North and Mid Coyote, as well as the South Coyote Valley Greenbelt.
3. Increasing demand for locally grown food, organic products, and specialty crops, and for on-farm educational programs and experiences based on reports by Bon Appetite and produce purchasers.
4. There is a potential market for locally grown and specialty foods amongst the diverse, high-income population of the San Jose metropolitan region.
5. Coyote Valley climate, natural resources, and proximity to potential markets amongst the diverse population of the San Jose metropolitan are a plus to future farmers.
6. A few Greenbelt farms and agricultural businesses would like to continue and perhaps expand operations

Environmental Opportunities

1. Potential opportunities to focus appropriate wetlands and habitat mitigation requirements in South Coyote Valley.
2. A wildlife corridor through the Greenbelt would link regional parks on the east and west sides of Coyote Valley.
3. Water quality generally good for irrigation, and use in agro-businesses.
4. Water supply is sufficient and affordable for proposed uses.
5. Potential establishment of new trail systems along fisher creek and augmentation of and connection to existing trail systems and natural habitat areas.

Assumptions and Principles

1. No additional subdivision would be approved unless it is consistent with the County's General Plan designations of 20-acre (Agriculture-Medium Scale) and 40-acre (Agriculture-Large Scale) minimums. Properties in San Jose would be subject to the 20-acre minimum parcel size requirement of the San Jose 2020 General Plan.
2. The major economic value of the property is the single-family home site. Open space and agricultural uses in the South Coyote Valley enhance the value of South Coyote Valley home sites.

3. Existing parcels of record are legally recognized, irrespective of size. They can be developed with a house and an additional “granny unit,” or other permitted uses if they pass certain pre-requisites conditions for development, including percolation and water supply.
4. While property owners may choose to engage in farming, there is no intention to force agriculture uses. Instead, agriculture uses are encouraged, not required.
5. Existing land uses that were previously approved by the County or City (for annexed properties) may continue even in their present use even if they are not consistent with the current land use regulations. There is no intention to amortize these “legal non-conforming” land uses.
6. The City and County do not have any plans to condemn, any properties in South Coyote Valley.
7. The City will not extend urban services outside the Urban Service Area, or beyond Palm Avenue into the South Coyote Valley Greenbelt area.
8. Encourage the preservation of existing agricultural uses in the greenbelt and minimize potential land use conflicts with new development.

Draft Strategy Elements

The Greenbelt strategy proposes to establish a framework to create and sustain a rural environment that supports high value rural residential home sites, active open space and related recreation, conservation, and various forms of agriculture, including small-scale agriculture and agro-based industries and related activities. The agricultural uses in the Greenbelt could be an important part of the aesthetic environment supporting high quality residential and open space uses, and a means of maintaining the open space lands and low intensity uses. The strategy framework consists of four principal elements: 1) Regulatory Framework; 2) Organization/Operations; 3) Financing; 4) Resource organizations with expertise for Greenbelt Preservation. Each is described briefly below.

Regulatory Framework

1. Development potential will be in accordance with existing City or County General Plan land use policies and Zoning regulations.
2. The Strategy should preserve opportunities for the location of a variety of uses and activities, including riparian corridors, trails, recreational facilities, agricultural and open space areas, buffers and potential executive home sites based on existing City and County land use regulations.

3. The Strategy should promote the establishment of design guidelines, landscaping standards, roadway design and other elements that enhance the quality of the rural landscape.
4. To the extent feasible, the Strategy should identify regulatory procedures to facilitate its implementation.

Operational Entity

1. Implementation of the Greenbelt strategy is proposed to involve the creation of a non-profit organization or quasi-public entity that is proactively involved in a host of activities designed to facilitate and coordinate small scale agriculture, and conserve open space and environmental resources. The entity would encompass a wide range of activities, examples of which are described below.
2. The entity would work with interested property owners to facilitate efficient and sustainable agriculture through coordination of water issues and assistance in establishing Williamson Act contracts to reduce tax burdens.
3. Agriculture could further be facilitated by the entity through efforts to match farmers and land through outreach and lease coordination. This effort could be enhanced by soil studies that establish soil suitability for particular crops in specific subareas.
4. The entity would actively work on “branding” Coyote Valley produce through marketing and promotion, establishing relationships with restaurants, supporting and coordinating farmers markets, working to establish farm to school food programs, and other initiatives.
5. The entity would work with property owners and public agencies to coordinate appropriate buffering of agricultural activities, and manage the interface between agriculture, open space, recreation and residential activities in the Greenbelt.
6. Implementation of the Greenbelt Strategy requires bringing together multiple outside funding sources (see below), and the judicious application of financial resources. The entity could serve as a proactive fund raiser and manager of certain ongoing financial sources to accomplish the goals of the Greenbelt.

Financing

A variety of funding sources would be needed to accomplish the Greenbelt strategy over the long term. More work is needed to identify the potential sources and magnitude of funding required. Nevertheless, some potential funding sources are described briefly below.

1. Seed money to create the non-profit entity and provide ongoing operational funding may be provided through a levy of some kind on the development planned to occur in the North- and Mid- Coyote.
2. A limited amount of open space, wetlands, agricultural buffer areas, and wildlife habitat may be funded as appropriate mitigation per CEQA for North- and Mid- Coyote development.
3. Funding and protection of buffer areas and key environmental/open space resources may be achieved through partnerships with open space and conservation organizations, such as the Silicon Valley Land Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, and Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, and other entities.
4. Some portion of existing tax levies to support regional open space might be directed to the Coyote Greenbelt.
5. Grant funding sources are available for various agricultural and conservation purposes that may be pursued in association with specific projects and activities.
6. Agricultural management services provided by the entity may be funded in part through fees paid by owners of the agricultural properties under management.

Implementation Mechanisms

These measures would generally include the leveraging of available money from various sources. Specific approaches may include:

- Habitat and hydrological recharge and opportunities for dual use.
- Other agency funding to implement their mandates (e.g. trails, open space, etc.)
- “Seed money” for landscape, open space and other right-of-way enhancements, and possible support for land management entity.

Timing

Like the CVSP, the Greenbelt Strategy is intended to be a long-term plan to be implemented over several decades.

Resource Organizations

Research and Farmer Education Institutions	Services
UC Cooperative Extension, Santa Clara County Office, San Jose http://cesantaclara.ucdavis.edu/	Statewide, UCCE works toward the development and protection of the state's land, resources and people. Includes more than 400 campus-based specialists and county-based farm, home, and youth advisors.
USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education www.sare.org	Serves farmers, ranchers, researchers, and consumers. Provides grants and information to Improve Profitability, Stewardship and Quality of Life.
UC Small Farm Center (Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources) Davis www.sfc.ucdavis.edu	Serves as a clearinghouse for questions from farmers, marketers, farm advisors, trade associations, government officials and agencies, and the academic community. Organizes and coordinates statewide conferences and workshops; publishes manuals and other publications about small-scale farming.
Organic and Small Farm Marketing Programs	
California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) www.ccof.org	Offers a premier national and international organic certification program for growers, processors, handlers, and retailers.
CDFA California Organic Program Sacramento http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/fveqc/organic.htm	Certifies California farmers as organic. Protects producers, handlers, processors, retailers and consumers of organic food sold in California by assuring that foods labeled as organic are, in fact, organic.
CDFA Certified Farmers' Market Program Sacramento www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/fveqc/cfmprogram.htm	Certifies California farmers and farmers' markets to sell direct to consumers. Verifies that each farmer is selling products that they themselves have grown or produced.

Small Farm Advocacy and Education	
Ecological Farming Association Watsonville www.eco-farm.org	Hosts conferences and workshops on various sustainable agriculture topics. The main activity is organizing the annual Ecological Farming Conference, now in its 25 th year. Held at Asilomar every January, this conference attracts over 1,000 farmers, researchers, educators, and marketers.
Farm Succession and Farmer Training	
California FarmLink www.farmlink.org	A non-profit organization that builds family farming and conserves farmland in California by linking aspiring and retiring farmers, and by promoting techniques and disseminating information that facilitate intergenerational farm transitions. Resources include workshops, case studies, and linkage services between retiring and aspiring farmers.
Agriculture and Land-Based Training Program Salinas www.albafarmers.org	A non-profit organization that promotes economically viable agricultural production that concurrently protects the environment through sustainable methods. Two programs, the Rural Development Center (RDC) and the Farmer Training and Research Center (FTRC), offer resources, technical assistance, education, training, and information access to families and individuals who aspire to become independent farmers.
Land Trusts	
Silicon Valley Land Conservancy	